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NOTE ON COUNTESS MARTINENGO CESARESCO'S
LOMBARD STUDIES

THIS book is hardly one to be reviewed at length in a professional journal, yet it is one that the professional student of English literature can hardly afford to neglect altogether. Passing over the incidental illustration of Tennyson's '*Frater, Ave atque Vale*' in the chapter on 'Benacus, the Poet's Lake;' of Clough in the chapter entitled 'Memorials of a Lombard House;' and of Shelley's *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills* in the chapter entitled *In the Franciacorta*, I will pause for a moment at the chapter devoted to Vittoria Accoramboni. This should be read by every student of Webster's drama. I quote one or two passages, to show the character of the author's comment. Referring to the title of Webster's play, the Countess says (p. 152): 'The last two words are enough to show that Webster must not be taken as an accurate historian, for she was neither Venetian nor a courtesan. Whence did he get his version of the events? Later writers have, one and all, drawn on an anonymous chronicler whose MS. exists in sundry Roman libraries; the author obtained his knowledge through a nephew of Pope Sixtus V, and he could scarcely, therefore, write impartially, a fact which makes one inquire if too implicit faith has not been placed on his narrative. Be that as it may, he was not Webster's authority, for the MS. was written after the play. Perhaps the poet learnt something from unwritten ballad literature; then, as now, doggerel ballads grew up like mushrooms in a night after any tragic event; for instance, only a day or two after the murder of King Humbert I heard a blind ballad singer at Spezia drawling out a dismal lay with the refrain, "*È morto il Re!*" Webster knew of these ballads, as he mentions them in several of his plays. . . . It is likely that Webster owed much to that unacknowledged fount whence all his compeers

drew, the talk of home-returned travellers.' After finishing her account of Vittoria's life, the author says (p. 155): 'And now I would ask, what would have been the effect on the spectators if, instead of this death scene, finely conceived as it is, Webster had reproduced one still finer, the real one? It would lend itself easily to dramatic representation. Vittoria with her beads, Flaminio with his lute, the sweet, solemn sound of the *Miserere*, the repose and religious gloom of the evening hour; then, the inroad of wild figures in grotesque disguises, brandishing torches and wielding arquebuses and daggers; the shot fired at Flaminio, the savage attack of the foul-mouthed assassin on the woman kneeling before the crucifix; Vittoria's bearing, as brave as in the play, but how much more touching in its feminine modesty and forgiving grace! Finally the murderer's horrified cry: "What have we done? We have killed a saint!"'

ALBERT S. COOK.

YALE UNIVERSITY.